

A Universe of Rhythms...Our Lives as a Complex of Rhythms

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We usually do not relate to happenings in our lives in terms of “rhythms” and “rhythmic difference”. I propose that “Thinking in terms of rhythms provides us with an additional way to make sense of goings on in our own lives, in the lives of others, and in the environments we are immersed in.”

The session will involve a reading, discussions, and illustrations to facilitate an experience of “rhythms”.

We usually associate rhythms with music and poetry. But rhythms are involved with everything we know and do. Rhythms as an exploratory tool can be applied to almost anything we can think of, from the infinitely small to the immeasurably large; from the immediate to the long term. Some terms related to rhythms include frequency, oscillation, vibration, cycles, waves, ups and downs, comings and goings, fluctuation, beat, rate of change, pace, routine, how often, and some others you can think of. You might think of “rhythms” as “patterns of change”.

We live in a Universe of change -- a Universe of changing change -- a Universe of rhythms. Our living constitutes a “complex of rhythms”. Each one of us has our own patterns of behavior. Forgetting this is often the source of poor interpersonal relationships, a great deal of stress, disagreeableness, many disappointments, unnecessary conflicts, and so on.

Student-practitioners of general semantics might have already made connections between the notion of rhythms and the principles of non-identity, non-allness, dating, consciousness of abstracting, general uncertainty, and others. We see things moving, expanding, growing, and decaying, and we are aware of change in speed, position, and form. Generally we don't usually think of things we don't see moving, as changing. We see individuals, objects, and situations -- We don't usually think of individuals, objects, and situations, as representing “a chronological cross section of happenings”, “stage of a process at a particular time-place”. Information we have about someone, some thing, some process, is not all that could be had, but represents information at a date. Forgetting this, we set up ourselves for shocks. When we send people and machines into space there is such an activity as “mid-course correction”...allowance is made for un-planned for and unexpected change. In our everyday situations, it might help us to remember that rhythms have rhythms, and that the way things have been changing also changes. We could benefit by including mid-course corrections in our everyday plans.

Think how difficult it was for you, or for any one of us, to change a habit or some behavior we ourselves wanted to change. Think of the resistance we put up when someone else wants us to change. We like to go at our own pace. When we apply this notion to individuals and to societies -- among the most complex structure-rhythms we know of -- we might get some idea of the tremendous task before any one or group setting out to change another individual, group, organization, or society.

Things change. And the patterns of change are related to their particular structure. Developing a sensitivity to rhythms can help us recognize trends, anticipate and better manage change; improve

the quality of our judgment, planning, decisions, expectations and so on. Thinking in terms of rhythms can be a way to minimize stress and anxiety and help us live healthier, saner lives.

Here are some situations where thinking in terms of difference in rhythms might help us do much better. Please add to the list.

Our symbols and languages are relatively static. But we live in a Universe of change. So no matter how early we are in arriving someplace, we are already late in terms of what was going on before. And so our maps are usually, to some degree, inaccurate and out of date.

Thoughts come fast and furious. Our bodies are restrained by gravity, things, others, etc. No matter how quickly and flexibly we move, we cannot keep up with the rhythms of our thoughts. When we forget this, and when we ignore our individual bio-rhythms, we could be heading for psychological-and-physical breakdowns.

There are many differences between our own rhythms, the rhythms of those we live with, those we socialize with, and those we work or do business with. Our expectations do not usually include recognition of rhythms. We can and do adjust and adapt...But there are limits to adjustment. Ignoring this can be a source of much conflict, disagreeableness, and stress.

There are differences between our rhythms and the rhythms of our environments. When we feel impatient, we might think of differences between our rhythms and whomsoever and whatever we happen to be impatient about. The next time you feel impatient and anxious, it might help to remember "rhythms": Others, and the world we live in do not always move according to our expectations -- They have their own rhythms.

Changes in our laws, beliefs, standards, values, moral, and ethical principles, do not keep up with the rate of emergence of new inventions, and new technologies, new discoveries. Laws of physical processes -- based on the discovery of diverse rhythms -- change more frequently than religious, political, and other belief paradigms. These asymmetric relationships will unavoidably create many personal, national, and international problems.

Colonizing empires, ignoring differences in rhythms, have forced peoples of different cultural backgrounds with different patterns of behavior to live together. When the colonizers leave, members of these different cultures, no longer restrained, revert to many former rhythmic, more familiar routines, and patterns of behavior. 'Rhythms' clash...and sometimes violence erupts.

Some societies are faster moving than others across many fronts...political, economic, sociological, etc. We can expect resistance and resentment when faster moving societies push or influence other cultures to make relatively fast, for them, changes.

There are differences in rhythms between the frequency of our automatic conscious operations (abstractions), and how often we are conscious that there is much more going on than we are aware of or can be aware of (consciousness of abstracting). There are differences between the rhythms of operations at the unconscious levels and the rhythms of our conscious operations.

We live in a Universe of Rhythms. We can become more sensitive to our own rhythms and the rhythms of others by simply being more aware. By noticing more, without any further effort, we begin to notice patterns of change...We become more sensitive to rhythms.

Studying and using the psycho-logical tools provided by general semantics (especially developing a feel of the differential calculus, in terms of incremental change) could help us become more conscious of, and more sensitive to: our own rhythms, the rhythms of our environments, and to a Universe of Rhythms. (For more on calculus visit <miltondawes.com>

Korzybski proposed general semantics as a “Theory of Values”. He also offered this epistemological proposition: “Structure is the only content of knowledge”. If we think of structure not statically but in terms of structure-function, we could time-bind this proposition to include change, and patterns of change (rhythms).

I propose that a consciousness of “rhythms”, our own, those of others, and those of our environments, brings on experiences worth valuing; and provides us with a way to make sense of things in general.

(For a longer version of “Rhythms” and other pieces, you might visit www.miltondawes.com.)